

Contribution of the Burundi Civil Society to the “soon-to-be-adopted by Parliament” Water Code.

A Water Code to ensure a rational and sustainable management of the water resource, in relation to the various needs and priorities of various stakeholders in the Republic of Burundi was developed after the country signed the Nile Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement.

Problem

In February 2011, Burundi joined five other Nile Basin countries (Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia) in signing the Nile Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement. The agreement refers to the utilization, development, protection, conservation and management of the river Nile Basin as well as its resources and establishes an institutional cooperation mechanism for the Nile basin countries.

Today, the Government of Burundi has developed a water code establishing fundamental rules and the institutional framework so as to ensure a rational and sustainable management of the water resource, in relation to the various needs and priorities of the Government, of the local communities, and of the various national and international commitments the Government has subscribed to. The water code will soon be submitted to the Parliament for adoption.

Civil society in general, and particularly the Burundi National Discourse Forum (BNDF) in accordance with its objectives, has the responsibility of making sure that the code takes into account the needs of the population,

and refers to the Nile basin Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) that Burundi has signed.

It is in the regard of contributing to the implementation of the CFA in the Nile basin and to the rational management of natural resources for the well being of the population, that the Burundi NDF organized a workshop to analyze the water code project. The results and recommendations have been sent to the Parliament to support the MPs’ analysis and thoughts around their deliberations on the code.

Activity

In order to address the problem as described above, a consultant was hired to make a meticulous analysis of the code project with reference to the CFA. He presented the results during the workshop organized on 19th October 2011, to a total of 24 participants who included MPs (Parliament commission in charge of environmental issues); Senators (Senate’s commission in charge of environmental issues); some members of CSOs (Burundi NDF) and none BNDFmembers; and Burundi Nile Media Networkrepresentatives).

Before the presentation on the analysis of the water code, the CFA content was explained to participants by the Burundi NDF National Program Coordinator, since it was to be referred to during the analysis of the water code project.

The MPs (Parliament commission in charge of environmental issues) invited are those to whom the draft water code was given for analysis before it was presented in the MPs’ plenary for adoption.



BDNF Chairperson giving his point of view (left) while MPs annotating views in the draft Water Code document

Outcomes

Water is the main resource and therefore the basis of the creation of the Nile Basin Initiative. Burundi being one of the upstream countries in the Nile basin community, it is mandatory that among its water laws, the Government incorporates trans-boundary management of that resource. The role of NBD/NDFs is to make sure this trans-boundary aspect is taken into account by the decision makers in their respective countries for the well being of the populations. It is in this perspective that a workshop of analyzing and enriching the proposed Water Code project for adoption to the National Assembly of the Republic of Burundi has been organized by the Burundi NDF to the attention of MPs and CSOs working in the environmental field. Through a thorough analysis of the code made by a specialist consultant, the participants made clear recommendations and various observations, especially by relating the project to the CFA, which is a regional law instrument and which Burundi adopted.

One of the recommendations by workshop participants, especially from CSOs to BDNF was to make a follow-up of the adoption process for the water code. It was envisaged that this once adopted, will indeed help in the rational and sustainable management of the water resource for the good of Burundian population in particular, and also the Nile basin population (riparian countries in which the water flows).

The rich recommendations and observations have been embraced by the MPs who participated in the workshop, and they agreed to have them incorporated in the Water Code before its adoption. The same have been officially forwarded to the highest ranking authorities in the country, namely the President of the Republic of Burundi, the 2nd Vice President (and in charge of Environmental issues), the Minister in charge of Water and the Minister in charge of Agriculture.

It is to be noted that the Minister in charge of Water sent an official letter to the Ministry's department in charge of Water and Towns Cleaning-up, the workshop contributions and

observations, and incorporate them where necessary in their plans and actions on the ground. The Chairperson of Burundi NDF is the new reference person to these departments for consultation purposes. This is a great success to the whole NBD family, and more victories are expected with the adoption of Water Code, to which NBD/BNDF has contributed greatly through the organized workshop.

Lessons learnt

The decision makers, especially Members of Parliament (MPs), are the key players for the change of policies. If approached, they are likely to help pass the issues NBD advocates for. It is therefore very important that they are always actively engaged and given opportunities in various planned advocacy activities on the ground. With this, it will be easy for NBD to have country programmes smoothly implemented for the good the Nile Basin populations.

One Nile, One family.